

Signature Foods -

DERIVATIONS, DEVIATIONS & DERIVATIVES

Maybe not as popular as baseball, hot dogs and apple pie, our Lobster Roll, Belly Clams and Oyster Pie are far more significant in defining the Marblehead Chowder House and what we are. And, it continues to amaze us just how many folks drive long distances to satisfy their craving of these culinary delights. For our special 15th Anniversary Issue of the Marblehead Messenger, we want to acquaint you with these items which are obscure to some but delicacies to others.

LOBSTER ROLL:

The Lobster Roll was a “no brainer!” Lady Bisque and I had indulged on these many, many times throughout New England, where they truly are a staple. A New England-style hot dog roll toasted is the vessel, chocked full of lobster meat held together by a little mayo and colored by a few pieces of diced celery. That’s it! That’s all! They seem to have been around forever and although associated with the state of Maine, are prevalent in shacks and restaurants throughout New England and Long Island. Some McDonald’s restaurants in New England and the Canadian Maritimes offer lobster rolls as a seasonal menu item, called McLobster Roll.

In 1929 Harry Perry, who ran a seafood shack in Milford, Connecticut, came up with a novel variation, the Hot Lobster Roll, warm meat bathed in butter. It was such a success that Perry’s restaurant soon sported a sign boasting that it was Home of the Famous Lobster Roll and his ridiculously rich creation became what Connecticut Magazine editor Charles Monaghan once dubbed “Connecticut’s greatest contribution to the world of regional cuisine.”

BELLY CLAMS:

Turns the stomachs of those not in the know. However, New England clam “aficionado’s” love ‘em! Clawed and Lady love ‘em – both steamed and fried. The Barnacle in Marblehead Harbor is

our favorite spot to savor ‘em! Served by none within seventy five miles other than the Chowder House, those who recognize these “Belly Clams” as a hard-to-get delicacy greatly appreciate that we carry them.

Maybe in Manhattan, possibly at some Jersey Shore seasonal shacks, or you must go to Connecticut to find them with any regularity. The fried ones – allegedly “invented” by Woodman’s of Essex, MA, are pretty easy to come by year around, but the “steamas,” as they are known, the real steamers, are very seasonal. This soft-shell clam is also known as Manninose, belly clams or “pissers.” Its shell is so thin and brittle that you can easily snap it into pieces with your fingers. The entire clam is too big to fit inside its shell. The siphon (also called the snout or neck) hangs out. They’re called piss clams, because the siphon often sticks up through the sand, and when you walk by, squirts you.

When eating steamed, soft-shell clams, remove the thing that looks like a sock, rinse the clam in its own juice and dip it in melted butter. Some of our Massachusetts purist friends don’t rinse or dip and have survived. (Edited from our Inaugural MESSENGER, Spring 2009)

OYSTER PIE:

Clawed’s first encounter was at Grandma Artz’s, perfecter of our Chicken Pie. My mother made Oyster Stuffing every Thanksgiving, but I never touched it feeling it was a disservice to the big



bird. I loved her mother’s Chicken Pie, so when told that the Oyster Pie was even better, I fell for a taste test. WOW! Maybe not better, but a stand-alone standout!

With no existing recipe to inherit, we stooped to trial by testing: Mimi’s Oyster Pie from Mystic, CT; Sotterley Oyster Pye from Maryland; and numerous others before landing on the one we’ve served now for 15 years. People wonder how it compares sales-wise to the other pies we’ve featured. Salmon Pie, Beef Pie and Maryland Crab Pie have all fallen by the wayside, not pulling their own weight in the sales department. Lobster Pie, a relative newcomer not on our opening menu in 1996, leads the way by far. Oyster Pie actually is dead last, following Quiche and Chicken Pie. However, it probably has an eternal place on our menu because so many people drive so many miles because it’s not served anywhere else. And, they tell us great stories about their first Oyster Pie encounter. Why not tell us yours?

Rest assured, O loyal Marblehead supporters, although not all of the items are Top Sellers, we feel the defining of our character, the protection of our image, and the consistency in trying to be what we’re trying to be are far more important than the numbers in the columns and the dollars in the drawer. Many of you travel a pretty good distance to savor these specialties you have a hard time finding elsewhere. We appreciate and respect that.